

EMPTY PEDESTALS PROJECT

an examination of public art

Conceived by *Marc Blane*

1991



*Purity, (Defeat of Slander), Leo Lentelli,
Longacre Square, New York, 1909, demolished.*

STOREFRONT

for Art & Architecture

97 Kenmare Street New York, NY 10012 212-431-5795

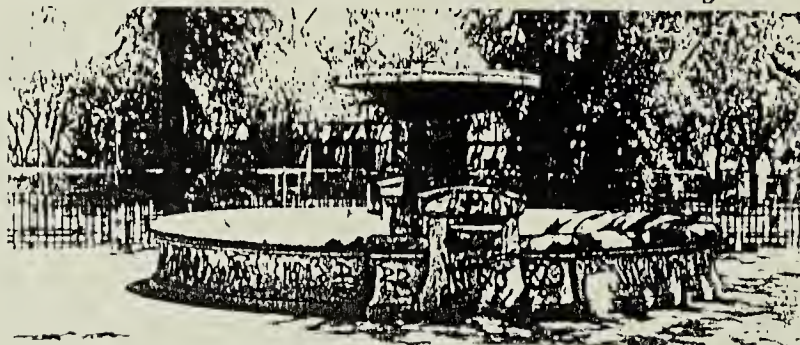
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Empty Pedestals Project



Exhibition dates:

April 25-May 25, 1991

Opening reception:

Thursday, April 25/6-8 pm

Gallery hours:

Tuesday-Saturday, 12-6 pm

Exhibiting artists and architects:

Ron Baron, Karen Bermann + Jeanine Centuori, Carl Chu, Curtis Cravens, Caleb Crawford, Sandy Gellis, Jesse Good, Steve Greene, Sheila Klein, Michael Lalicki, Paul Landon, Linda Lindroth + Craig Newick, Niki Logis, Peter Lynch, Mike Metz, Carolyn Moskowitz, Gary Paige, Dan Peterman, Joe Pomar, Charles Renfro + Anne Nixon, Christopher Scholz + Ines Elskop, Peter Sebök

The **Empty Pedestals Project** is an experimental forum to examine communication in the the urban environment of the late twentieth century. The project focuses on what might be called predesignated public art sites, that term referring to a space that has already been coded by the government as a space for art, that to date has not been erased. Four of these sites in New York City will serve as the basis of new proposals by artists and architects. These are: the Crotona Park Fountain in the Bronx; the Grieg Bust in Prospect Park, Brooklyn; the Discus Thrower on Randall's Island, and the Jacob Schiff Fountain on the lower east side of Manhattan.

All of these sites , for various reasons, including vandalism, theft, and storage rather than maintenance, have been stripped of their focal sculptural elements, and their decaying classical bases now stand empty. The chosen public art sites are representative of similar ones created at the turn of and early decade of the 20th century in New York and in other American cities; an era that encouraged the creation of art for the populace and which saw monuments and architectural sculpture as essential in a comprehensive city plan. The original function of these works was their affirmation of European values by using classical forms in neighborhoods that were composed largely of European immigrants. Today these neighborhoods have for the most part been repopulated by ethnic groups of nonEuropean origin whose cultural forms have little to do with the classical vocabulary of Western culture.

The purpose of the Empty Pedestals Project is to initiate a dialogue through new works by artists and architects about the potential for these sites and for art and the form of the city in the next century. The project has been organized by Storefront in collaboration with the artist, Marc Blane, who conceived the project.

Storefront is funded by the New York State Council on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, foundations, corporations and individuals.

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All of these sites, for a variety of reasons including vandalism, theft, and storage rather than maintenance, have been stripped of their focal sculptural elements, and their decaying classical bases now stand empty. The chosen public art sites are representative of similar ones existing throughout New York and in other American cities; ambitiously scaled public sculptures were created at the turn of and in the early decades of the twentieth century, an era that encouraged the creation of art for the populace and which saw monuments and architectural sculpture as essential in a comprehensive city plan. The original function of these works was their affirmation of European values by using classical forms in neighbourhoods that were composed largely of European immigrants. Today these neighbourhoods have for the most part been repopulated by ethnic groups of nonEuropean origin whose cultural forms have little to do with the classical vocabulary of Western culture.

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Meeting Minutes/Empty Pedestals Project 3/6/91

Present: Marc Blane, Jane Dodds, Shirin Neshat, Sandy Gellis, Linda Lindroth and Craig Newick, Curtis Craven, Caleb Crawford, Peter Lynch, Charles Renfro and Anne Nixon, Joe Pomar, Jesse Good, Mike Metz, Peter Sebök

Absent: Stephen Kornis (Rensselaerville, NY), Michael Lalicki (NYC), Ron Baron (NYC), Paul Landon (Montreal), Nicki Logis (NYC), Carolyn Moskowitz (Toronto), Dan Peterman (Chicago), Jeanine Centuori (Bloomfield Hills, MI), Karen Bermann (San Francisco), Sheila Klein (L.A.), Gary Paige (L.A.), Carl Chu (L.A.), Chris Scholz (NYC)

LL: Is there community support?

MB: Not really because neighborhoods are mixed. This is an opportunity simply because the sites exist. We are by recognizing them instituting a program of use--public sculpture evolving as a civic intention. What's happening now is the opposite of their original intention, decay rather than order.

Documentation of a number of other "empty pedestal" sites that exist in New York was passed around.

Marc asked if anyone wanted to ask him anything about any of the sites.

SG: What about the Crotona Park Fountain?

MB: It was originally installed at City Hall and then moved to what was then moved to Crotona, which is about four blocks from the Grand Concourse, then considered to be something like the Jewish Park Avenue; the neighborhood was home to many (German) Jewish immigrants.

Other information about Crotona: There was once a Bronx Borough Hall overlooking the fountain. The cowpaths that run through the park to the fountain were once flowerbeds (in the 20s and 30s). When Sandy Gellis lived there in the 50s early -sixties the neighborhood was very mixed: Italians, Hispanics, Russian Jews, etc. The neighborhood is now very Hispanic, and economically depressed; there are many boarded up buildings, graffitied facades etc. The fountain basin is now filled with dirt and may be used as a giant planter; there are a few evergreen shrubs in it at the moment.

What about Jacob Schiff?

MB explained that he was a Jewish immigrant that had become a wealthy financier, and desired to give something back to the neighborhood.

Other information about Jacob Schiff Fountain: The neighborhood surrounding Seward Park is very mixed--China town is moving into it, there are many Hispanics, a long-established Jewish community, many artists etc. The building visible of the fountain when it was intact is the Chatham Square branch of the New York Public Library.

Caleb: Are there scale drawings available?

MB: The City of New York archives or the Parks Department may have them.

Curtis: Randall's Island is a particularly interesting site; the only things there are Downing Stadium, a children's psychiatric hospital, the New York Fire Academy and the Triborough Bridge Authority.

General discussion about how many of the sculptures were removed, eg the Henry Hudson light pole was stolen in its entirety.

MB: The Discus thrower was originally by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and then moved to face the entrance of Downing Stadium.

Sandy Gellis asked for an enlargement of Crotona Park shot.

Curtis C. brought up the existence of many huge empty pedestals in the Soviet Union.

SG asked Marc if he'd installed his basketball project at Jacob Schiff.

MB: No, in the end the Parks Department said they couldn't take care of it and so it was never installed.

Curtis: You could have done a 'hit and run.'

MB: Not 'into' guerrilla art, prefer to go through the system; that's part of the idea.

SG: Sources for research?

MB: New York City Art Commission.

LL: Museum of the City of New York, Parks Department-Arsenal Building, Municipal Art Society Library is accessible by appointment.

Curtis: Is text necessary?

JD: No.

Marc suggested a notebook with writings be available at the exhibition. JD said possibly, but if visually alright, why not with the piece? Also said that writings could go in the catalog, which is going to be done, although not a glossy-paper, high-budget production.

CN: Wondered if the project didn't tacitly accept the classical site frameworks.

JD: Said the proposals need not be confined to pedestal and could be very critical of the context.

PL: vis a vis empty pedestals: it's like a city with missing teeth.

SN: Can people choose other sites, not one of the four?

JD: No, MB and I chose the sites carefully for their different site conditions and different ideals originally represented.

Discussion that documentation of more than the four sites would be presented in the exhibition.
Discussion that some of the proposals of course would be very specific to a site and structure and others very general.

MB: Disappointed that there is not minority representation among the artists.

JD: We tried.

General discussion about condition of pedestals (sorry, didn't take it down).

PL: Can emptiness be made pliable? Emptiness not as a condition of despair.

MB: You're right, can be viewed as beautiful. ...I've been *bad-vibed* to death.

JD: Spelling?

Caleb is going to try to get site plans for the Jacob Schiff Fountain and Crotona Park Fountain; he will bring them to Storefront.

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Note: minutes are not verbatim; sorry for any misparaphrases or omissions

